SELF PUBLISHER!™

MAGAZINE

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ALICIA HOLLINGER
JESSE JAMES COMICS

A WRITTEN VIEW

SNEAK PEEK!

TODD BLACK & GUARDIANS

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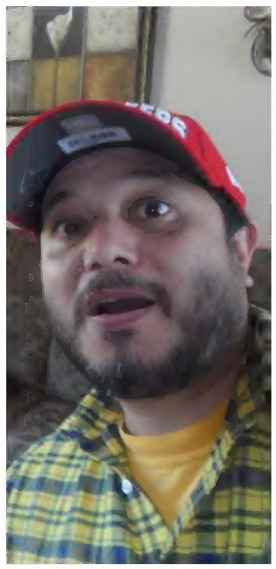
SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

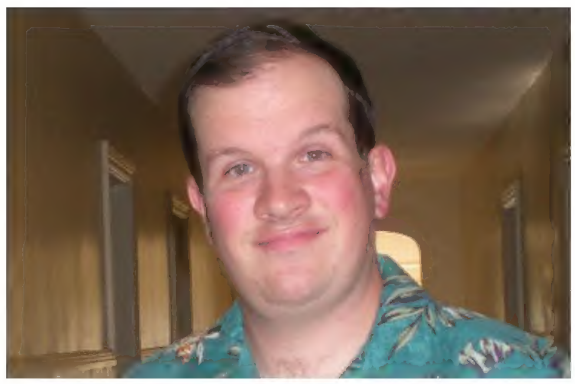
Thank you for coming to read another issue of Self Publisher! Magazine. Without you, there is no reason for any of this. You who are reading this, you are the reason why I get up in the morning and fight every day to make things work here. You are why I spend time and effort in conversation with as many people as I can to build and get things right with this magazine. When the last issue came out, I spent a lot of time putting some new display things in order and getting other things set and ready for our continuing growth, so that we won't hit "the wall" and get too big for our own good. Our goals are to maintain a focal point of interest here in our pages and to work harder to make physical copies available, so that the magazine can have more eyes looking at it, finding out about new and different creators, finding out what new books are out and where, and so that we can build the atmosphere of a growing, thriving community.

So, we've got a solid roadmap, we've added some new writers and features, and we'll probably have some more starting up soon; the Hall of Fame project continues to gain momentum and focus, and I've started some discussions about getting Small Press Idol back into the mix for 2015. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop, something bad to happen that throws a monkey wrench into everything, and brings us to a screeching halt... but that doesn't seem to be happening. If anything, with the extra help and hands we've got now volunteering to help with SP! and the SPA, it looks like we're really going to be ok. So, everyone, take a deep breath and look around. I think we're getting to the fun part. That's pretty cool. Could not have done it without each and every one of you who takes the time to read the parts of SP! that interest them each month.

That's something that came out in the research I did. All of SP! is not for everyone. We cover some things that pertain to this group, and cover other things that pertain to another group, and some people like one writer's articles, and some like another's. And that's good. You might not always read all of what we put together each month, but you are reading what you are into. We're going to build on that thought, and I feel that the cross-breeding of audiences is important. So when people ask what Self Publisher! Magazine is all about, don't fret! We're not just about the business. We're not just about the hobby. We're not just about comics. We're about the people who make stuff they hope others will find entertaining, no matter what level they are at in their careers.

- Ian Shires





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Here Come The Guardians!

An Interview with Todd Black

By: Louise Cochran-Mason

Todd Black writes comics, computer games (including development of the stories and quests for Dawn of Ascension for Winterleaf Entertainment LLC), and content for "geek culture" websites (such as TwoDashStash.com, which he also owns).

He has a degree in Video Game Development and has experience in design, having "modeled bones, pots, and weapons for a new application that will be used for archaeology students at various colleges". He also has experience as a games tester, though he prefers to focus his attention on his writing.

He founded BlackMagicWolf Productions to produce his own comic, Guardians.

Todd tells us more:

SP!: What is Guardians about?

TD: Guardians is really about two heroes, brothers that were created by the Great Maker to defend Delta City. Their creation, and what they do after they are created, is really the crux of the series. Because they aren't beings who've been around for a long time; they were just born, yet they're adults. And though they have knowledge and control of their powers, they don't know how to be anything but Guardians. That's compelling to me, as it really delves into the question of "Is there more to my life than just my purpose?"

SP!: How did Guardians get started?

TD: I originally did Guardians as a movie series. I wrote short stories about superheroes of my own design. There were four stories, each telling an ongoing story, and I loved them. But then I finished and I felt I could do more. So I starting thinking about it and thought, "What if I made it a comic book?" And it kind of took off from there.

SP!: Do they have secret identities, or lives apart from their mission?

TD: No, not at present. That's part of what the series is about. When they're not defending those in need, what do they do? Well they stand on an old watchtower called The Perch and wait for danger to arrive. And that's all they do: wait to be needed. Will it always be that way? Will they ever truly interact with the people below? You'll find out as we continue.

SP!: The story is a religious allegory?

TD: In some ways it is. I mean, I literally say that the people cried out to their maker for help, and then our tagline is "They asked for angels, they prayed for saviors, what they received were Guardians," so there are some aspects of religion in here. And there will be some going forward, but I see it more as a story about life than it is about religion. There are undertones that are tied to religion, but I don't beat you over the head with it. Because that's not what I wanted, and I want Guardians to appeal to everyone, regardless of race or religion.

SP!: Does "The Creator" make an appearance at some point?

TD: Oh yeah, he'll be "around". The Maker is very much a looming presence, after all; without his creating the Guardians we wouldn't have a comic book series! Ha, ha. But yeah, there's some questions hanging around that only The Maker can answer, and answer them he will... eventually.

SP!: Who are Element and Chaos?

TD: Element and Chaos are the Guardians. Both were created by The Maker to protect Delta City. They're brothers, and like most brothers, they're very different from each other. Yet despite all that, they're very loyal to one another and their trust in each other is very, very, strong.

SP!: In the preview, Chaos seems more selfless and more at ease with people than his brother. Will that cause friction as the story progresses?

TD: Really? That's how you read it? Interesting. In truth, that's not exactly right. Element is the Guardian who wants to be around people. Wants to be a part of them. You'll see that in Guardians #1. Chaos sees the people more... logically. He knows he has a mission, and it's to protect them, and he'll do so. In #0 he has a great line, "I don't pander to the crowd". He knows Element would love to stay with the crowd and chat with them forever and that's fine, it's just not him.

As for selflessness, they're both pretty selfless. They would both give their lives for these people, and each other.

And as for friction...yeah, there're going to be some tense moments coming. Not immediately, but I have a plan for an arc that'll change up the dynamic pretty good.

SP!: Why do people initially fear Chaos? The way he looks?

TD: Exactly: he kind of looks like a bad guy. Black armor, powers over darkness… that sounds like a bad guy, right? Yet, it's not true; he's as good as they come. A lot of people think that darkness is evil, plain and simple, and that's not true. Chaos is there to prove that, and having him look like that is a way to show it.

SP!: Does Element get frustrated and angered by the prejudice against his brother (people fearing him because of his appearance, rather than judging him by his heroic actions)?

TD: I wouldn't say he gets frustrated, though more than likely, he's saddened by it. Yet, just like he believes that Chaos will become friendlier with the people, he believes the people will come to like Chaos as he continues to show he really is a hero.

SP!: Does Element have a destructive side? His powers could be rather violent.

TD: Well, all powers are destructive if used in the wrong way—or the right way, in some cases. Both Element and Chaos have control over their powers; it's not an X-Men situation where they have to train to get control, they already have it. But that does make them a little more dangerous, as they know what they can and can't do, and in Guardians #3, you'll see two very different takes on how powerful, and dangerous each of them are.

SP!: Does Chaos embody Chaos Theory?

TD: Umm, I'm going to have to go with 'no'. Chaos was created to show that darkness in the world is necessary. What's day without night? Light without shade? Etc. People will look at Chaos and think "he's a hero?" and wonder how that is, but at the end of the day you'll see he's just as much of a hero as Element, and that he wants nothing more than to protect Delta City.

SP!: What made you decide to do a preview issue?

TD: We really think of it as a prologue issue. I got the idea of making it a #0 issue from DC Comics and it just seemed to fit. It was always going to be there, but I didn't want to confuse anyone by having them think, "Oh this is the first story of the first arc!" when it isn't. This is our setup, our creation story, so Guardians #0 was born from that. It was only supposed to be a ten-page story, but then it doubled as I thought of more to tell, and I couldn't be happier with how it turned out. And now that it's free, it's even more accessible for people to read.

SP!: Who is the target audience?

TD: I truly see Guardians as an all-ages comic. There's plenty the kids will like, but the adults will find it very enjoyable as well. There's depth in the story that makes it enjoyable for everyone. And I wanted a comic that a parent could read, like, and know that if they gave it to their kid, they wouldn't worry about them seeing or hearing bad things in it.

SP!: Do you plan to produce print copies?

TD: I would love nothing more. I've had numerous requests to make print copies, but at the moment, I can't afford it. If I were to get a publisher who would offer to sell my comics in a store, I'd definitely be tempted to join them. For right now though, digital is what're doing. It has its ups and downs, but so do print issues, if you think about it.

SP!: Have you approached publishers?

TD: Yes, and some have approached me. Right now, I'm under the banner of the Powerverse, a line of comics headlined by The Legend of Will Power. The creator of that comic, Vince White, approached me and asked if I wanted to join him and I said yes. We're working together right now to help really get Guardians off the ground.

I'd love to have Guardians under the banner of DC, Marvel, or Image, but for now, I'm content with being in the Powerverse.

SP!: What made you decide against using a print-on-demand printer (even temporarily)?

TD: Ka-Blam is how I print comics for promotional use. I'm still looking into it though, because I've heard other people say some negative things about it and I don't want to commit to a service I don't feel comfortable using.

If I could find a reliable POD service that both creators and fans are pleased with, I'd be very open to pursuing that for Guardians.

SP!: What is your background?

TD: My background? Well I like to think I've been a writer for a while—my whole life, in some aspects. I just love telling stories. I got my degree in Video Game Development, but I knew as I did it that I really wanted to be a part of writing the stories for the games. And I always excelled when it came to writing stories.

With comics, it was just a natural extension of what I was doing. I had the idea of Guardians for a long time, but it wasn't in comic form. It was a movie idea originally, but I slowly began to expand the idea until I thought, "What if I made this a comic?" Then after a push or two from some comic industry people, I made Guardians.

SP!: You don't have much about yourself on the website. Do you prefer to let the work stand alone?

TD: That's honestly unintentional. I keep meaning to put stuff on the site, even if it's just a little bio page, but I never get around to it. And honestly, I'd rather just have them interact with me on our Facebook page or our Twitter feed. I want to be the kind of creator who really does interact with their fans and listens to them. That's what I really want: a fanbase that isn't afraid to give suggestions in order to make the comic better. But I'll get to work on that bio page!

SP!: Who is the art team?

TD: For Guardians #0, our art team was Chua Eng Chee and Alex Garcia. Both amazing guys with great talent. Then from #1–#3, Alex took over full time and he just keeps getting better. I would not be here without either of them.

SP!: What are the artists' backgrounds?

TD: I can really only speak to Alex, in that he's done a lot of art in many different mediums. I met him when I posted an ad for a video game project I needed concept art for. After it was done, we parted ways, until Guardians #0 came about and he found out I was looking for a colorist. He happily volunteered his services and later on, became our full-time artist.

In between making Guardians #2 and Guardians #3, he helped me with a more personal project and did a bunch of animations for me. The end result is amazing and I can't wait to show it off.

SP!: Will you be going to any conventions and/or making any appearances this year?

TD: I'm going to C2E2, the Chicago Comic-Con. I won't have a table, but I'll be around handing out cards and giving away free issues. I'm open to doing more cons and a good friend has suggested some local ones, but for now, it'll just be C2E2. If my fanbase is big enough by next year, I'm hoping to do a panel about Guardians. Fingers crossed!

SP!: You have a YouTube channel?

TD: Yeah, I'm using it to really connect with my fans. I'm trying to start video series where I'll come on every week and do something special. I've been slow to get it started. We only have one video up in that department, so I have to get back on that! But I also do video announcements to keep people involved and let them know what's going on. Or, if something special is happening, I'll do a video. It's just my way of trying to connect with them beyond writing a paragraph or two on an FB page.

SP!: How have you promoted Guardians?

TD: I have done a bunch of Facebook promotion. We have almost 400 likes on the Guardians FB page. I've done Twitter, I've written articles and blogs on other sites to help promote Guardians. And I've even done live TV interview about my comic.

And I'm getting ready to go to C2E2 Comic Con to promote Guardians and spread the word.

SP!: Crowd funding has become very popular. Is it something you are considering?

TD: I have tried that, actually. Multiple times, in fact. Some of my attempts weren't really thought out, to be honest, but I did one right before I went full force into making Guardians beyond the zero issue and it just didn't work. We're considering it again, especially now that we have four issues out that we can use as rewards and proof that we've made a comic.

Though it's popular, the ease of getting a Kickstarter project makes for a lot of projects getting out there. And unless you're a big name or have a project that is so epic that everyone can't help but donate, you're kind of bound by what you can do. It is a viable option though, if planned correctly. And we're going to do the best can the next go around.

SP!: Would you consider or are you seeking work-for-hire, as well as self-publishing?

TD: Like me writing on another series? I'd be up for that. With the right series, of course. I love writing and if I can help grow my experience and my fanbase by working on other comics, I'd be totally up for that.

SP!: Are you planning to make an app or video game to tie in with Guardians?

TD: You're not the first to suggest that, actually. It's very tempting, and done right, it could be epic. But I honestly wouldn't know what kind of

tie-in to make for Guardians. At least, not at the time of this interview, ha, ha. Thinking about it, there are some possibilities, and if someone approached me and offered to make it, I would listen.

SP!: Do you think the Internet has made it easier for independent publishers to publish and distribute themselves.?

TD: Yes, entirely yes. Especially with Comixology and how easy it now is to make your own website and sell comics from it. If you think about say... ten years ago? Even with the internet, it was hard to do anything outside the big publishers and digital comics (as far as I can recall) weren't a thing, or at least not in much quantity. Now they're EVERYWHERE, even from the big companies. It's double-edged sword, to be sure, but as a creator, I respect anyone who takes the chance and makes a comic based on their own ideas.

SP!: Do you think the number of self published comics, print-on-demand comics, digital comics and web comics makes it more difficult for individual creators and independent publishers to promote and market their work?

TD: That's the double-edged sword I mentioned earlier. And it's along the same lines as the Kickstarter topic I brought up. Because it's now easier to make and sell a comic, it clogs up the market, in a way. It's not impossible to have a decently-selling comic, but now more than ever, you have to have something unique to grab them. I think I did that with Guardians, but it wasn't as easy as it looked.

As for marketing, that's tough. Because on, say, Facebook, you'll have forums and forums of people posting their work and EVERYONE can see it. And some people don't even read it, because they know in general what it will say. It's rough, but if you believe in your project, you can't give up.

SP!: Did you have any setbacks when you were developing, creating, and releasing Guardians?

TD: The first setback was finding good artists. First off, they had to fit my price range, and then I had to see how dedicated they were to the project. Did they WANT to make a good comic? Or did they want to draw it just for the paycheck? With both Alex and Eng Chee I got artists who were talented, willing to bend to make things better, and wanted nothing more than for the comic to succeed. Alex is patiently waiting for me to contact him about making Guardians #4; he loves drawing this comic.

Releasing was also a struggle, because at the time, I only knew about Comixology and their submit program. Thus, that was my only option to release Guardians. I followed their procedures to submit Guardians #0 and I got accepted. Little did I know that I'd have to wait six months for it to be released. It was rough. Then, once it got released, it was another three months until Guardians #1 came out. That's when I had enough. I knew I had to change tactics and thus, through a chance encounter, the Guardians website got made. So, through struggle came enlightenment, in a way.

SP!: What are your influences?

TD: My influences? Well, I love DC Comics and I love Marvel Comics. I grew up on Batman and Spider-Man, and it was awesome. I dreamed about being on those superhero teams, about having powers and fighting bad guys. It was awesome... again.

And I'm not afraid to say that my experiences with both watching and reading those comics influenced Guardians. Sometimes it's subtle, other times it's putting a twist on a character and making it totally my own. That's how our next villain, Phase, came to be. He'll be the star villain in Guardians #4 and just hearing his name, you're probably know his powers and more-or-less who he was inspired from. Once you read it though, you'll see just how different he is. And that's the fun of making your own comic.

It would be an honor to work for either of them someday.

SP!: Do you have any advice for people who want to start their own comic?

TD: Have your idea fleshed out. Be ready to pay to have your comic made. Be true to yourself in your comic. And, most importantly, have faith in your comic. Those last two are very important, at least for me. Because if you try and change your comic to what you think people will like, then you're slowly going to lose everything you loved about your comic. I'm willing to be flexible with Guardians, but certain storylines, certain characters and relationships, I'll refuse to change in some ways. Not because I'm stubborn, but because they mean something to me and I have them that way for a reason.

As for the last point, you need to believe in your comic, or else, what's the point? If you don't believe in it, why should readers? And when the dark times come, whether it's bad sales, reviews, or opinions, you need that faith to keep you going. So, stay strong, be patient, and do whatever you have to do to make your comic successful. It may take a while, but if you try hard enough, it just might work.

SP!: What projects do you have coming up in the future?

TD: I won't lie. Guardians is my main one, but I'm trying to branch out in my writings. A big project I did last year was a fan-fic based in the Avatar cartoon universe. It was an original story, based on the Avatar that came after Korra. I call it Avatar: Spirit of Earth. That was a joy to write and, by far, one of my most in-depth stories. I loved doing that.

Also, I'm writing a lot of scripts for TV shows I'd like to have done, with me on staff of course! Mainly, I have an idea for a SHAZAM! TV show. I have 26 scripts written so far, and I have ideas that go on for seasons. The only bad thing is that it will be tough getting DC to look at it, but like I said before, I have faith.

Aside from that, not much, I'm open to doing a lot more. I would love to write for a career, whether it's in comics, TV, movies, or video games. I would love to write video games stories. After all, video game development is what I got my degree in.

SP!: What are your hobbies?

TD: Well, I love watching TV. Cartoons especially, shocker. I play video games a lot; I'm a diehard Nintendo fanboy. And, of course, I read comics. I read a lot of Marvel and DC, and Wednesdays are very special to me, because of comics.

SP!: Is there anything else you'd like included in the article that I haven't covered?

TD: Just to check out my comic at www.guardians-comic.com. You'll find all four issues for sale there. And be sure to check out our Facebook and Twitter feed. I really do want Guardians to be a comic that I can make better because of the fans, and contacting me through our pages and letting me know your opinions of the book will help do that. I wouldn't be here without the fans and I wouldn't be able to continue without them either. It's as much their comic as it is mine and I totally respect that.

Outside of that, I just ask that people who are interested check out the comic and then, if they like it, spread the word! Guardians has been a dream of mine for years and I want to continue making it for years. With your help, I may just be able to do that.

WEBLINKS:

www.guardians-comic.com/

http://guardians-comic.com/buy/issue-0/ (free preview issue)

www.facebook.com/GuardiansComic

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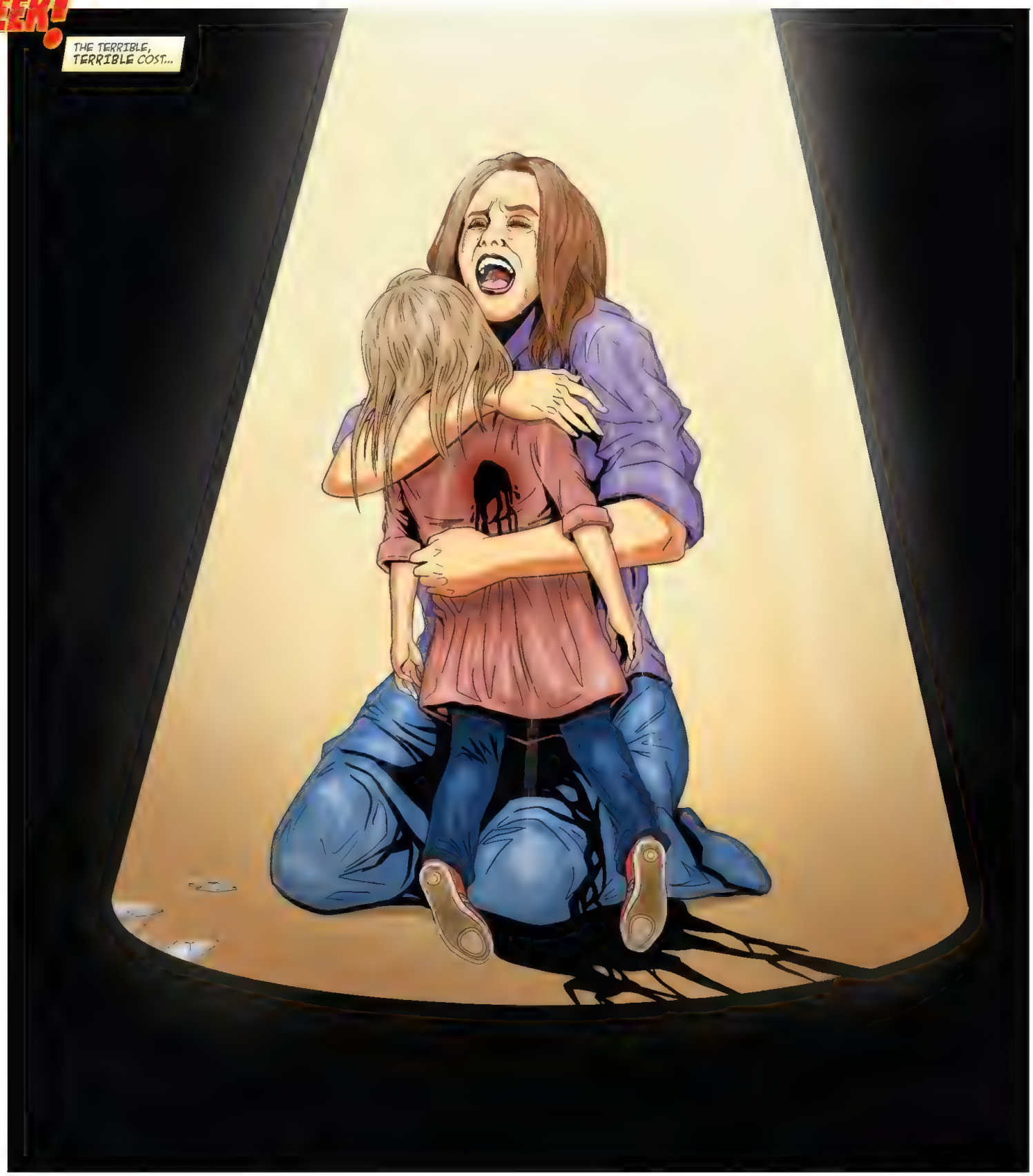
AT FIRST THEY JUST TRIED TO MOVE ON. TO PRETEND IT WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO THEM.
BANG
BUT THE COST...


THE TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE COST...

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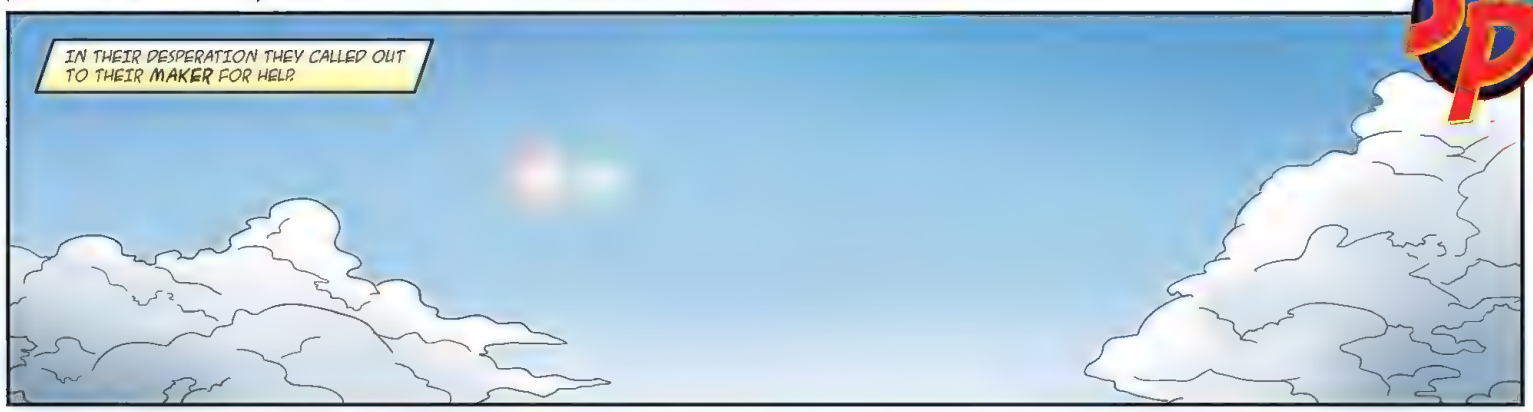
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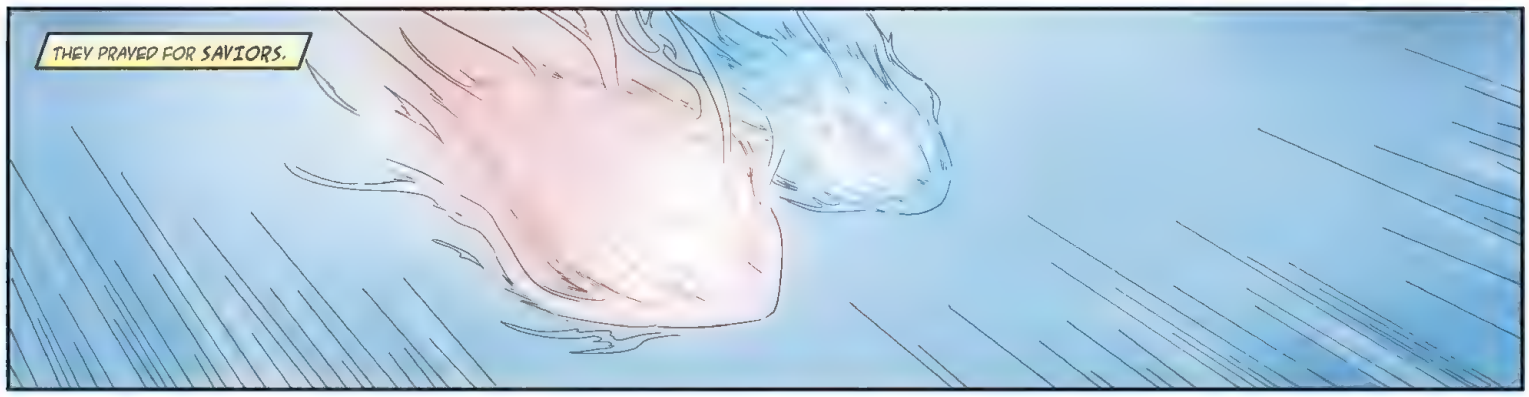
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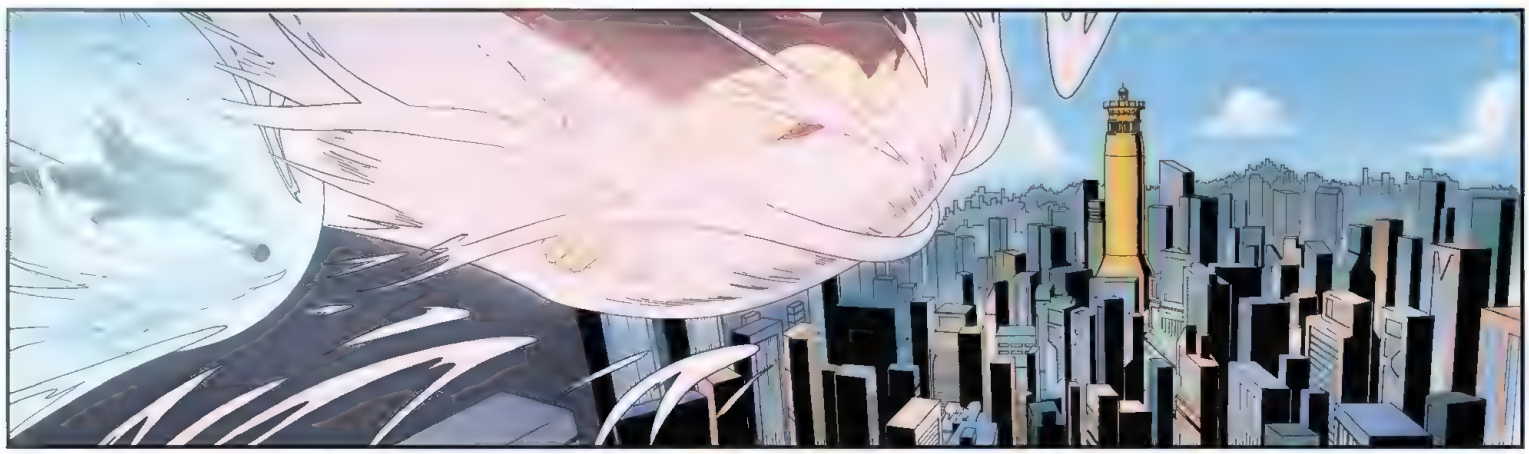

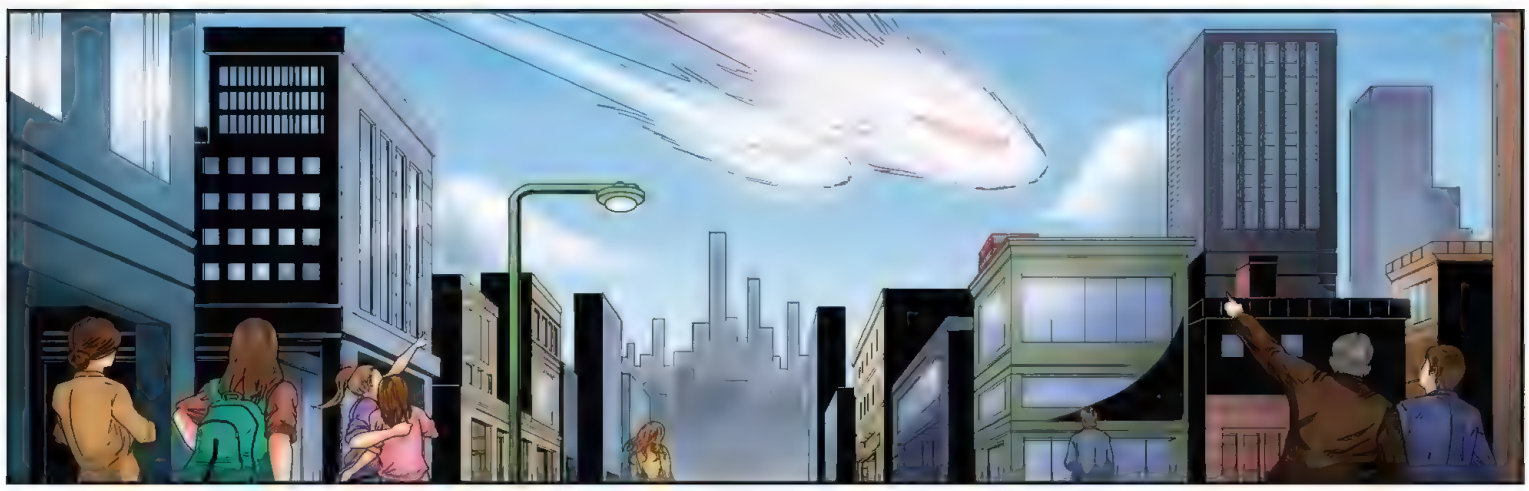

GUARDIANS

SNEAK PEEK!

D SOLDIERS
ZEIN
DRAGO BENTLEY
TRAIL
WINTER CITY
EXPERIENCE
THE ALL NEW
CLOUD 9 COMIX
ON IOS,
ANDROID &
KINDLE FIRE
FELLOWSHIP OF THE GALLOWS
THE MIGHTY TITAN
N WARRIORS
DYNAGIRL
INFINITY
CLOUD COMIX

A WRITTEN VIEW

Writing tips

It's gone wrong now fix it!

By Douglas Owen

You're writing, you're hammering the keys, your cursor is flying across the screen, and words pour out of your mind like there's no tomorrow. Then it happens. Something is wrong. The story is collapsing. The plot line is wavering. Your characters are refusing to behave according to your outline. You just lost the flow and the story has now fallen apart.

The words go through your mind: Six months and now all is screwed up!

So what do you do now? Cry? Stamp your feet? Pull your hair out? Format the hard drive?

I usually head for the kitchen and bake some bread. Once it is out of the oven, I slather it with salted butter and eat it hot. There's nothing like carbs to get the brain going. Then I head back to the work and fix it.

THERE ARE FIVE TYPICAL PROBLEMS YOU'RE LIKELY TO COME ACROSS WHEN FINISHING YOUR STORY

Here is how to fix them:

Quilting Circle

You've got scenes all over the place. Everything is a mess. You've written the way you wanted to, the way you planned, there is a pattern, but stuff just appears to be everywhere.

The fix? Go back to each scene and put in some transition notes. Link stuff together. Notes (that can be deleted) and dialogue can do it for you. "How did the station survive the meteor storm, Bill?" or "Next week?" or "Yeah, the aliens will probably be gone by then." When the door to the spaceship opens a few hours later, the flow will become seamless.

Uncharacteristic Character

All of a sudden, at word 60,000, your character has a foot tapping problem. But he's a sneak attack person with swords! How could he have such a nervous tic? It just doesn't ring true to the character.

The fix? Foreshadowing. Put something in the beginning.

Example, your protagonist is an assassin. He relies on stealth and nerves of steel. There is a coldness about him. So, insert a simple incident to join the parts together. "He took the pill and the shaking stopped. He would be able to sneak tonight."

Depressed Scene

After hours of writing, you discover the story is digressing. It's pointless. Irredeemable. A lost cause.

The fix: Cut it! What else? But don't delete it completely. Save it as a draft that you could possibly reuse in some later chapter or even in another story. Work it and you'll find the words are not wasted.

The same thing applies to things you've written with beautiful descriptions or great characterisation. "Her eyes looked like two great galaxies in the heavens that exploded releasing the energy of her soul." Now isn't that full of flowers? Is it pretentious? Yes. But it might work if another character says it or mutters it when she looks at him. Characters, especially those who are affected by beauty, are allowed to be pretentious.

Goodbye Plot

The logical outline of your story is implausible. If the characters are doing this, could they not have done it a few chapters earlier or later?

Bet they could have. Every novelist has had this dilemma and every novelist will have it in the future. Hell, I wrote a chapter fifteen times to try and get it right. And no, I won't tell you which book or which chapter.

The fix? Before you hit that delete button, see if you can change something in the story that happened in the past. It could fix the logic. Then, weave it back into the chapter to straighten out the storyline. If something you wrote surprises you, the author, it will definitely surprise the reader.

PLAGIARISM AND YOU

Your plot is original, amazing, and beyond belief. It's a fantastic topic. You see your name on the Bestseller List. You have over half the story written when a friend hands you a novel, already published years ago, based on the same ideas. Heck, even the character names are the same! No, you didn't steal the idea. The big problem is if you submit the work, reviewers will scream "PLAGIARISM!" Sure, they will.

The fix? Twist the plot, and twist it radically. Present an entirely different theme. If you do that , probably nobody will hold the two novels against each other. And even if they have similar themes, what does it matter? You cannot copyright ideas. If you could, only one novel would be written in the world that centered around vampires or space travel.

But do make sure you change those names or other proper nouns that were also used in the other novel, like spaceship names.

Just Avoid the Problems

By writing a detailed synopsis and bouncing it off a fellow writer, you could avoid the issues above. It is always a good way to involve someone else involved in your writing process, as well as using them as a sounding board.

Use the outline to test the logic of the plot in every chapter. How are the transitions? Are the characters plausible? Your critiquing person will help figure that out.

In the business world, each proposal for work is written, read, and rewritten many times before it is published. The first draft is never used, except as a reference point. And if you are lucky enough to have several of these problems during your day of writing, then good; it means you are actually doing the writing and it means something to put words to page, even if you have to rewrite them.

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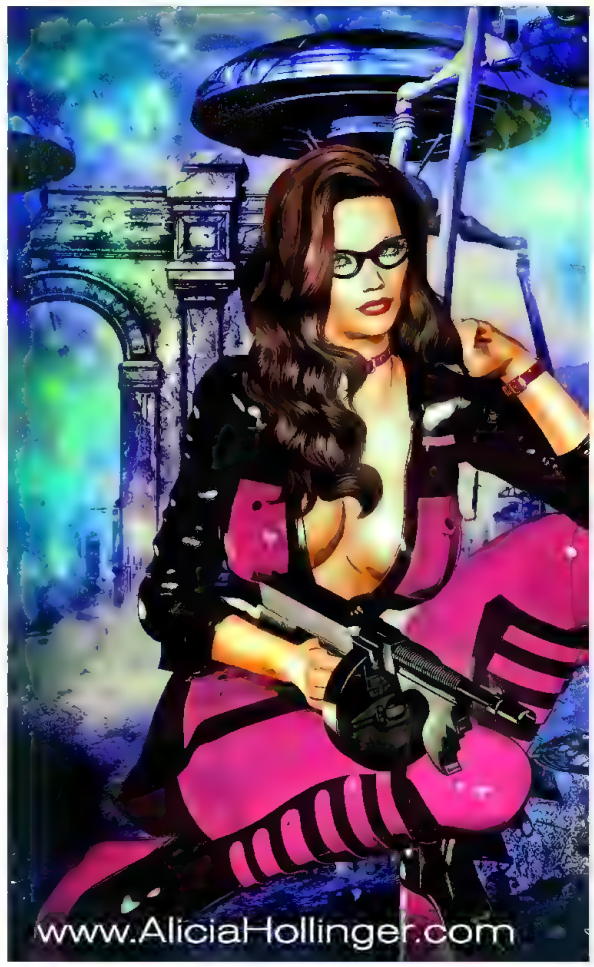
Alicia Hollinger

By: Mark Turner

Alicia Hollinger's art is permeated with echoes of a bygone era of pulp and pinup art that has been infused with the techno vibrancy of the 21st century. With an impressive CV that includes work featured in the pages of Heavy Metal Magazine and art showcased at Petra Gallery in Beverly Hills, she is quickly building a following in the industry. Her book, Alicia's Pin-Ups: Sci-Fi, Fantasy & Girlicious Pin-Up Art, showcases her incredible eye for fantasy and sci-fi. Ms. Hollinger was gracious enough to take time out of a busy schedule to share a bit about her art, where she finds her inspiration, and more.

SP!: Your book, Alicia's Pin-Ups: Sci-Fi, Fantasy & Girlicious Pin-Up Art, showcases your work, which is evocative of the pinups from the 40s . How did you come up with the idea to take this art form and apply the sensibilities of sci-fi and fantasy to it?

AH: The answer to that is a long, circuitous story... I'll start with the weird part. Ever since I was a baby in my crib, I've had lucid dreams (where you know you are dreaming WHILE you are dreaming), which made me question reality and ponder the existence of alternate dimensions and the possibility that our consciousness can extend beyond the physical body. This sparked my interest in sci-fi and, eventually, theoretical quantum physics. Totally unrelated to this, when I was a little girl I liked to draw my own paper dolls and design clothes for them and give them different hairstyles. When in L.A., I did the usual "trying to be an actress/model thing," but just encountered a lot of sleazy casting couch offers from agents and low-budget producers. Then I got an offer to work in film acquisitions at an international film distribution company and, since I loved playing with Photoshop, I ended up creating some of our movie posters, ads, and marketing materials, as well. Then I discovered 3D software and found I could create "dolls" again, but this time in the computer. They started out as girls with high fashion looks similar to the high end trendy fashion models on billboards on the Sunset Strip. A friend saw what I was doing on the computer and suggested I attend Comic-Con. "What's that?" I asked. That was 2009. I went to my first San Diego Comic-Con, and after major culture shock, found myself "geekified" by day four. I checked out all the comic book companies and their covers and thought, "I could do that..."



Back in L.A., I attended the usual model/actress/bimbo parties that I was used to, and sort of had an epiphany while waiting in line for the cabana bathrooms at the Playboy Mansion. Somebody said something about "time," and I kind of blurted out, "According to quantum physics, there's no such thing as time." The second I said that, all the guys turned to me in awe and completely ignored all the Playboy centerfold girls and surrounded me. A whole conversation about quantum physics ensued and those poor centerfold girls were totally ignored, because the guys were actually more interested in talking to me about quantum physics! Who knew? So, then I thought, what if you mix Playboy/Maxim/Victoria's Secret type girls WITH sci-fi and then I came up my transmedia project, QUANTUM PARTY GIRLS (still in early development http://wwwquantumpartygirls.com). Influenced by Comic-Con, I started to combine pin-up style girls with sci-fi, deciding to

market primarily to the male demographic.

SP!: This particular book is billed as Volume 1. What do you have planned for Volume 2?

AH: Volume 1 is more of a sampler of various styles and genres. Volume 2 will be all sci-fi and planning ahead for different niche-style books, like all Steampunk, sexy girls next door, Playboy type girls with candy and sweets, pop culture pin-up girls (based on video games and comics), exotic girls, fantasy and fairies, and other theme-style books.

SP!: How did you happen to get into this particular niche of pop art? Have you always had an interest in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy genre? Which do you enjoy more, Sci-Fi or Fantasy?

AH: My interest in sci-fi was originally sparked by my lucid dreams. I often see futuristic technology in my dreams and fascinating worlds that don't exist in "real" life. My interest is definitely more in the sci-fi realm, because of my love of futuristic technology and things like wormholes and alternate dimensions. And quantum physics is slowly proving some aspects of sci-fi to be sci-fact and the technology in my dreams is being invented...

SP!: You also write. Will any of your creations actually become characters in upcoming projects?

AH: I have three characters I created specifically for my QUANTUM PARTY GIRLS project and some will also be used as pin-ups. The writing will be in comic book style, plus each of the characters will have their own blog online. This is still in early development. When it's done, I may make it available in book form too. I also have a concept for a pin-up digital comic book involving just one girl.

SP!: Creatively, who would you say some of your influences are

AH: I guess, a combination of every sci-fi TV show or movie I've ever seen, the Jetsons cartoon, comic book covers, and classic pin-up art. My favorite sci-fi style is that mod 60s retro-futuristic look, so the Jetsons had a strong influence, and maybe subliminally, early Star Trek, although I've only actually seen a few episodes, but I love the outfits and hairstyles.

SP!: What methods do you use to create your art? Do you use live models?

AH: Everything is created in the computer using 3D and 2D software. No real people are used. The models exist only in the computer. Guys are deeply disappointed by this fact, LOL...

SP!: Some of your work features characters with strong sensual aspects. How has the fandom response to art infused with sexuality been? Where do you think this public fascination comes from?

AH: I live in LA. All the most beautiful girls in the world come here to be models or actresses and, for some odd reason, all the straight males want to have sex with them, LOL. Not exactly brain surgery. There has always been a public fascination with sexuality and always will be... I've also noticed a huge increase in female sexy Cosplay at the comic book conventions, so apparently now, even girls are into it. Being a hot girl actually is a "superpower;" they can destroy politicians and powerful men! The girls I create don't exist in real life, of course, but we all know men love to fantasize...

SP!: What is up next for you? Where can fans find your work? Planning any convention appearances in the near future?

AH: Heading to Wondercon in Anaheim this weekend; sharing a booth with the Battlestar Galactica fan club... I'll be in the art show at San Diego Comic-Con; probably won't have a booth there, but that could change... Long Beach and several other cons ahead too... People can like my Facebook page to keep up on con appearances and check out new art and projects as I create them: https://www.facebook.com/AliciaHollingerArt And follow on twitter: @AliciaHollinger

Next up is more ART! More comic book covers, pin-up art books, art prints for sale, my transmedia project... Oh, and as far as writing is concerned, I'm novelizing a screenplay I wrote a while ago. I guess the genre would be considered a paranormal/sci-fi romance... That one is more targeted to women, but there are some aspects to it that sci-fi lovers and conspiracy theorists should like.

And here all my links! :

MAIN SITE: http://www.AliciaHollinger.com

PURCHASE PRINTS: http://alicia-hollinger.artistwebsites.com

PURCHASE BOOKS: http://amzn.to/1dEvjGy

FACEBOOK: https://www.facebook.com/AliciaHollingerArt

TWITTER: http://www.twitter.com/AliciaHollinger

QUANTUM PARTY GIRLS: http://www.QuantumPartyGirls.com

Alicia has shown her art at Petra Gallery in Beverly Hills, Meltdown Comics Gallery in Hollywood, Pixeldrip Gallery events, Nucleus Gallery in Los Angeles, Titmouse Studios Hollywood, L.A.'s Comic Book Sunday, pop-up store galleries in LA, Long Beach Comic-Con, Wondercon, Condor-Con, LA Horror Fest at Raleigh Studios, Pop-Con LA, and Stan Lee's Comikaze. Her work has been featured in a book published by Heavy Metal Magazine, in the December 2013 issue of Heavy Metal Magazine, and on various comic book covers.

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Comic Shops & The Indie Market

Jesse James

By: Jacob Thomas

There is absolutely no doubt that the age old myth, "It's not what you know, it's who you know" can be laid to rest, as research demonstrates.

In the last decade, several big-budget movies and comic book titles have been produced under even larger names, such as Marvel, DC Entertainment, and comics respectively. Yet, in the last decade, what started as underground has now evolved into a populace worthy of mention next to said big names (if not bigger for some titles).

Through thorough research, I came across this seemingly rapidly-growing trend when I visited Jesse James of Jesse James Comics at 43rd Avenue and Bell Road in Phoenix, Arizona. When asked for his view on how comic shops have taken notice of today's indie market, he immediately let loose with a world of insight, bringing to light just really how far the indie community has come out the woodwork.

In the last decade, Marvel and DC Entertainment have put out several large-budget movies and television shows, including comic book titles that make us fan-boys and girls excited for the comic book future itself, not only as a business, but as a well enjoyed creative visual medium. And, as is often sensed within the movies, television shows, and comic book titles, the bar for the creators who work on these projects seems pretty high. So, does that affect indie creators negatively or positively, as they attempt to strike it big with either their very own indie projects or the big leagues? Jesse James delights us with an answer.

"I think the biggest thing to realize is that only 15 percent [of those] that view comic book movies are comic book fans. Yeah, only 85 percent of the market never picked up a comic book before, most likely never came into a comic book store before. Does it affect indie creators negatively? No, absolutely it doesn't. It gives more people the chance to create books themselves, through Kickstarter

or [the] vast majority of publishers who are looking for great writers and artists."

From a shop owner's perspective, indie today now makes up one third of the comic book industry as a whole.

"If you take actual numbers of how many independent comic books come out every month, Marvel and DC are dwarfed..."

Let's not forget, we are also locked in a world now nearly reconstructed by the digital revolution. Digital comics are also included in these numbers, considering digital outlets like ComiXology and various others. Yet again, the number of indie creators continues to rise without the use of digital sales included in their marketing strategy.

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, DeviantArt, and countless other outlets are being utilized to their fullest extent to not only grow the viewership of their posts and comic titles, but to create a brand out of their own names. But does the social media help or hinder a new indie creator?

SOCIAL MEDIA VERSUS LIKENESS

Jesse reveals an insightful perspective.

"Indie creators are just regular people. You can say, 'I like him, I like what he posts so I'm gonna buy his book now, but it's also reversed. You have guys that are political and they say stuff and alienate their fans and fans will drop them. So, is Facebook a good jumping point for an Indie Creator? Yes! Social media allows them to grow."

When I asked how shops, not publishers, have utilized this to their advantage, I was further blown away by the numbers.

Today, a shops inventory is stocked with 75 percent of independent comic titles and/or publishers; Image Comics being ranked at the top. It seems the culture you build as a comic shop owner is ideal for success, not only in standard sales, but in increasing sales to unknown and semi-known talent. However, no two shops are the same, James explains, indicating that indie success in a shop is on a case-by-case basis.

For indie creators, it seems that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. James explains that at the end of the day, there's a fine line between a community store and a comic book store that's there for a community, and that's what he believes creates the success for new and independent writers and artists.

So, are there any other steps comic shops have taken to help ensure the success of indie writers and artists? James states he usually holds events at his own store and others. These events vary from Kickstarter parties to advice and support for Kickstarter projects, and more.

Conclusively, indie writers and artists are on the rise dominating today's comic industry and becoming the #1 seller in nearly every comic shop across the world. Robert Kirkman's "The Walking Dead" is a formidable example, with issue #100 being the top-selling comic book of the last decade.

"It's commitment, word, and producing at the end"

Jesse James Comics opened its doors in 2009 at a current 7500 sq ft and continues to expand. James began collecting comic books in 1982.

The Pop Report

Attendees of the SPACE Show, April 12th &13th 2014

By: Ian Shires

Last month, I delved into a new angle of research and observation, examining the top online distributors. Now, I was going to begin by doing a careful examination of what each one was showing as their top sellers this month, but a different opportunity came up. I hit the SPACE show in Columbus, Ohio this year with a focus on building awareness and support of the Self Publisher! Hall of Fame. I talked to a lot of people and arranged a number of articles that will be getting developed and assigned out for future issues. Last year, I wrote a pretty quick overview of the show for the weekly SPA Newsletter. This year, I wanted to expand on it. Sitting there on Sunday with a stack of returned fliers with info from people I talked with to bring home and load into the HOF (of which I've only actually gotten a few in so far; hopefully, by the time you're reading this, everyone will be in!), I struck on the idea to ask a solid cross-section of them about a few of the things that were swirling in my. And so, I sent out a bunch of short email questionnaires and got back a great selection of additional opinions... which I will be sharing as we go.

How does this fit into the context of a Popularity Report? Well, to preface: last year, I made the controversial statement that we were all failing the SPACE show. That I had heard creators complaining that their sales were low and that I felt that publishers should not be relying on the venue to supply a stream of new potential fans. That creators should know how many fans they have in an area and they themselves should be the draw that brings people to the venue. To an extent, I still hold that view, but I also completely understand the hobby side and that just being at the show with that many other small press creators is really all that matters. I had a really shocking conversation this year with Blake Werts, who has started up a minicomic-sized news-zine called Copy This! (Contact him at bwerts@vnet.net. He is concentrating on the minicomic with his zine, so if you work in that medium or are a reader who loves minicomics, you NEED to get in touch with him about Copy This!) He had been talking to Dan Taylor at length and when he was done, I told him he needed to let me know more about his news-zine and we should share info. He let me know he was aware of SP!, but that it was "too pro" for him. Well, it took a bit of conversation to hopefully have made it clear that I grew up making minicomics and I will always consider myself rooted solidly in that arena of thought. SP! Is not intended to ONLY be about the professional self publisher. Holding onto and improving and expanding the hobby-level, just for fun, is as much a part of our mission with this magazine as anything. As I grew from drawing my own comics to working with others, etc, I learned that there is one thing we ALL want: new people to read our stuff. The pride of making a minicomic by yourself is the same pride as opening a box with a full sized full color book you worked with three or four other creators to complete and have printed. Anyway, Blake, I hope our conversation made an impression on you and we can work to keep our audiences fully aware of all aspects of small press publishing and where to get and learn more about the things that interest them.

I first asked people if this was their first time at a SPACE show. Most had been going for years, a few for a decade or more, and a couple were indeed newcomers. So, I am confident that we are getting a good overview of opinions as we proceed, seeing through new eyes and experienced ones.

I next asked what their best impression about the show was, what they enjoyed the most. A general consensus was that camaraderie and sense of community was the best part of the show. Almost everyone noted this aspect. Canada Keck mentioned that getting to see a favorite's artwork up close and personal was important to her, and I think that is something many "just fans" like to spend time at the show doing, since when I walked around, the places where you saw people leaning over tables, were usually over portfolios. Jason Young mentioned that having the opportunity to be on a panel with one of his favorite cartoonists was his highlight.

I asked then whether there had been any disappointments. Was it a successful show for them? Overwhelmingly, people reported that it was. More than one reported best-ever sales, while only a couple said foot traffic seemed low, but even that criticism was prefaced by noting that meeting new collaborators made up for it. A few mentioned that the hotel itself was an issue, the fact that it is undergoing renovations, but is still very run-down, and sort of out

of the way. We did get a mention that people in the side room didn't seem to get nearly as much attention or traffic as the main part of the room, and that they had talked to others who were over there and many felt the same way.

Will people be coming back? Well, simply put... across the board, the answer to that question ranged somewhere between "Of Course" and "Absolutely". Most people consider it a don't-miss show and I'll add that SPACE is the only show I have never missed and never will. I feel it should be used as a model of how creator-only shows could and should succeed in other areas. Of how such a show can bring forth a thriving artists/publishing community. It is a destination for those farther away and a touchstone event for everyone.

Which leaves us with the eternal question: What would make the show better? This year, on Saturday night, there was a comic reading/karaoke event. I did not go because, despite how much I love to sing in front of people, I knew the venue for that was going to be too small, too crowded, and too hot. And that was confirmed, both by people returning from it and by those that mentioned it in my questionnaire. If it had been held in the hotel's own bar, you couldn't have kept me away from it by handcuffing me to that old piano in the lobby. Instead, a number of us "older" publishers sat out there and did jam comics, which... is fun on any level. Other answers to this question included changing the location of the hotel and increasing the level of awareness of the show. More than one person said that promotion of the show needs to be increased. To them, I can only reflect back to my statements at the opening of this article. While SPACE is the "comicon" of creator shows, it certainly needs everyone to up their game, win more fans, and then, get those fans to come to the show. That is the nut that we're trying to crack, as a community, with this magazine, in the name of the Self Publisher Association, and in this column, the POP Report. Popularity is not something that any of us are OWED. It is something we have to figure out—how to be so COOL, we just ARE. Jason Young mentioned, quite maturely, "Cross promoting with the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum is a good idea. More of that kind of thing would be helpful, I think. Sometimes you just can't plan for everything that might draw people away from the show (competing comic cons, weather, sporting events, etc.) but as the show slowly grows in size, more people will be drawn to it."

I wanted to thank everyone who sent in their thoughts and opinions to my questionnaire. I am sorry if I didn't mention everyone by name: not all parts of this lent themselves to direct quotation. So, to Lou Graziani (graziani@gmail.com), Canada Keck (kitakitsune@rocketmail.com), Chris Charlton (chris@assailantcomics.com), Jason Young (veggiedogsaturn@gmail.com), David Branstetter (strawmancomics@gmail.com), Rob Garcia (rebel.illustration@gmail.com), Tim Kenyon (mail@capstancomics.com), and KY Swartz (swartzkt@gmail.com), I appreciate your candor and the time you took to talk to me, both at the show and in this effort.

Max West

Finding The Everyman in Every Mammal

By: Jennifer "Scraps" Vanderbeek

When you see comics filled with talking animals, you might think of classic Saturday morning cartoons or the comics section of your Sunday paper. Words like "slapstick," "pratfalls," and the ubiquitous "pie-in-the-face gag" might even surface. Can these funny animals tell truly human stories, much less evoke the necessary gravitas in serious situations? Artist Max West certainly believes so.

Growing up in New York City, young Max would regularly check out the comics sections of the Post and the Daily News—the work of Schulz, Keane, and Davis are apparent influences in the streamlined black-and-white style he's chosen for his own work. The backgrounds of his comics also show hints of another influence: painter Paul Klee—often described as an Expressionist, there are also strong elements of cubism in Klee's work, the echoes of which we can see in West's landscapes, in particular.

West's teenage duo, Rusty and Sam

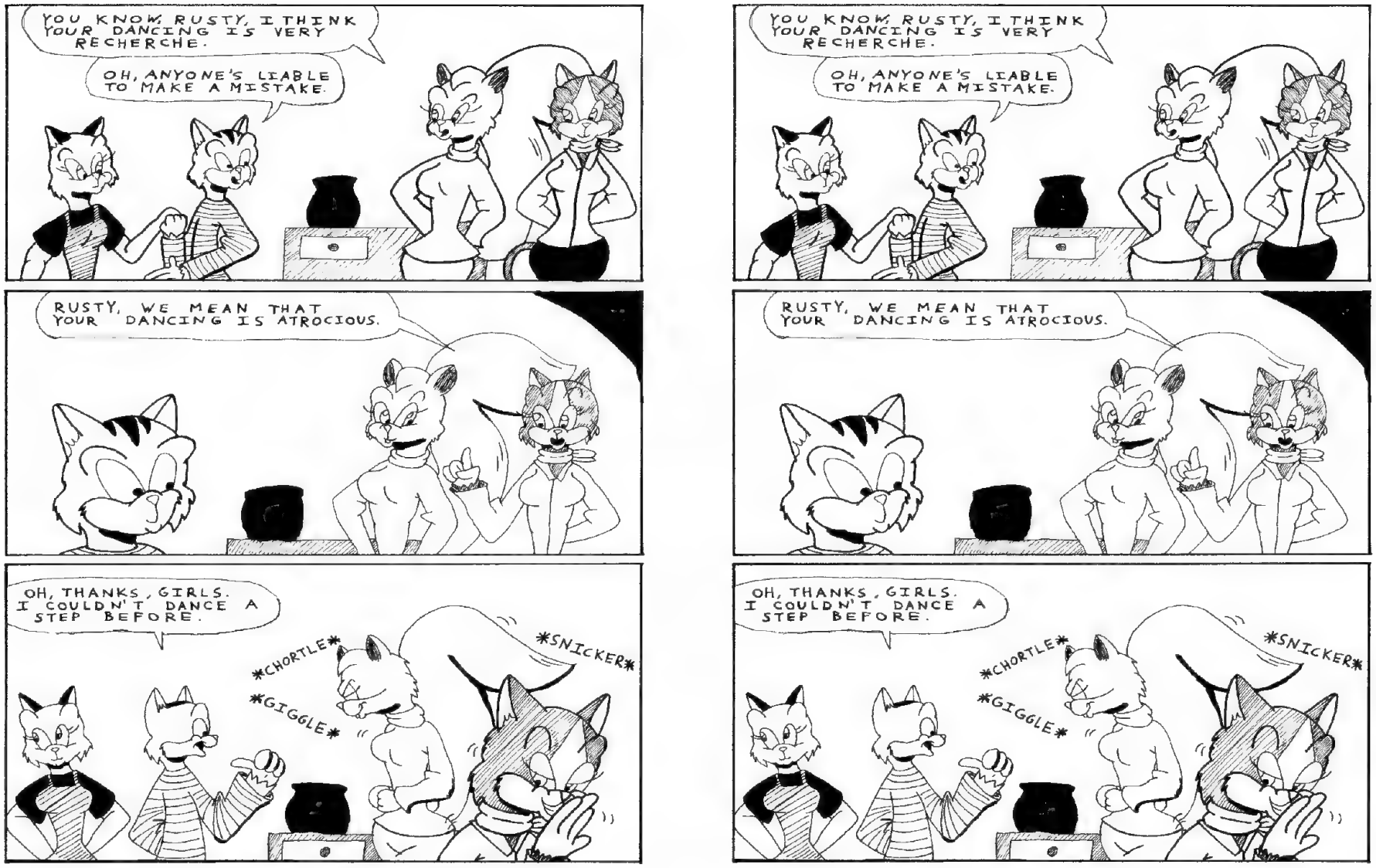
In the late 80s, West moved from the familiar surroundings of Queens to a small, rural area of North Carolina. Very much a fish out of water, West would later use his experiences of acclimating to a new town and a slower pace of life, and the people there, in his slice-of-life comic, Sunnyville Stories. Stories follows the everyday adventures of two anthropomorphic cats, Rusty Duncan (loosely based on West, himself, with a dose of Peter Parker for comedic flair), and Samantha "Sam" Macgregor. Described as "polar opposites" by their creator, their interactions rely heavily on the "opposites attract" model. But the question remains, why draw them as animals?

While admitting that animals are a bit easier to draw, West maintains that "it's also a matter of working symbolically. Making the characters animals can make it easier for a human reader to identify with them. Had I made Samantha (the female deuteragonist) into a blonde-haired, blue-eyed little girl, some readers may have had a tougher time identifying with them." Suddenly, Looney Toons and the entire Disney stable of animal actors don't look so childish, after all.

In a move he describes as "genre adultery," West has also given his characters a new scene to play in his take on the classic vampire mythos in the recently released Von Herling, Vampire Hunter. Devotees of the genre will appreciate his treatment of the topic. Gone are the more modern images of vampire as romantic swain; his Vlad Magnus is more in line with Lugosi's classic portrayal. Swapping comedy for Gothic horror, West's simple, straightforward line art actually works very well to bring the story to life, as he uses the black-and-white contrast to the story's benefit.

A panel from Sunnyville Stories

When it came time to publish Sunnyville Stories, the artist was confident in its all-ages appeal, but received successive "no"s


YOU KNOW, RUSTY, I THINK YOUR DANCING IS VERY RECHERCHE.
OH, ANYONE'S LIABLE TO MAKE A MISTAKE.
RUSTY, WE MEAN THAT YOUR DANCING IS ATROCIOUS.
OH, THANKS, GIRLS. I COULDN'T DANCE A STEP BEFORE.
CHORTLE
GIGGLE
SNICKER
YOU KNOW, RUSTY, I THINK YOUR DANCING IS VERY RECHERCHE.
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CHORTLE
GIGGLE
SNICKER

from the traditional publishing gatekeepers. "I was secretly relieved that the publishers had rejected my work," he says. "I didn't want them telling me what I couldn't do. I don't like the thought of an editor looking over my shoulder and saying, 'No, you can't draw that'. I feared compromising my artistic vision." So, West decided to self-publish under Different Mousetrap Press and has, to date, put out two trade paperbacks of Sunnyville Stories (as well as individual issues), in addition to the stand-alone Von Herling. And while he keeps his art traditional, West hasn't shied away from delving into the digital distribution outlet. His work is available in print and digital download through IndyPlanet and Amazon, using a combination of Photoshop and Kindle Comics Creator to prepare his work for optimum viewing through Amazon's preferred platform.

Relying mainly on word-of-mouth and his social media presence to spread the news of his stories, he also sought out recognition and review in various trade publications. Likening the process to "throwing a bunch of stuff to the wall and seeing what sticks," he got a lot of passes, but did see coverage of his work in both the Library Journal and the Midwest Book Review. While many of these publications prefer the larger, established houses, West cites the Midwest Book Review as being much more receptive to small press outfits.

What does the future hold for Max West? More Sunnyville, at least for the time being. Volume 3 of Sunnyville Stories is expected out in early 2016, there is the possibility of a Von Herling sequel in the works, and another series (a fighting-themed story tentatively titled "Sheldon the Mighty") is waiting for its chance on the drawing desk.

Jennifer Vanderbeek is the author and illustrator of What to Feed Your Raiding Party, the comic book cookbook for gamers, and self publishes under Random Acts Comics from her home in Tallahassee, Florida.

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Jemir Johnson

Looking at the Elamentz

By: Ellen Fleischer

Jemir Johnson is a freelance writer and comic book publisher. He is the co-founder, primary publisher, editor, writer, and sales representative of Creative Elamentz Studios. His recent graphic novel Blind Corners was touted as "an engaging graphic novel with a memorable protagonist" by examiner.com. Mr. Johnson was gracious enough to sit down with SP! this month to discuss his works and his experiences with self-publishing.

SP!: How did you initially get into writing? Have you taken any formal training (e.g. writing classes, workshops, etc)?

JJ: In high school, my English teacher gave an assignment to create a play the entire class could see performed and critique. At that stage, though I saw myself as creative, I didn't have creative writing in mind as something I wanted to do. We had a little over a month to submit it and my entry was a script that kind of rambled, had a scattershot sense of focus, and got a fair share of laughs from my teacher and classmates when performed (which was kind of a relief, since it was SUPPOSED to be a comedy). That was the closest I've come to taking a class on writing and I'm sure there are a legion of people reading that going: "Ohhh-kay. That explains it" (laughter).

That said, a majority of my experience came from just writing as often as I could, soliciting honest critiques, learning from my missteps (perceived and otherwise) and—at one point—reading virtually every "How To Write …" book ever produced in the English language (laughter), applying any lessons absorbed to the best of my ability. The "How To …" books by Stephen King and Peter David (which dealt primarily with comic book script writing) were the two that had the biggest impact.

SP!: How did you get turned on to writing crime fiction?

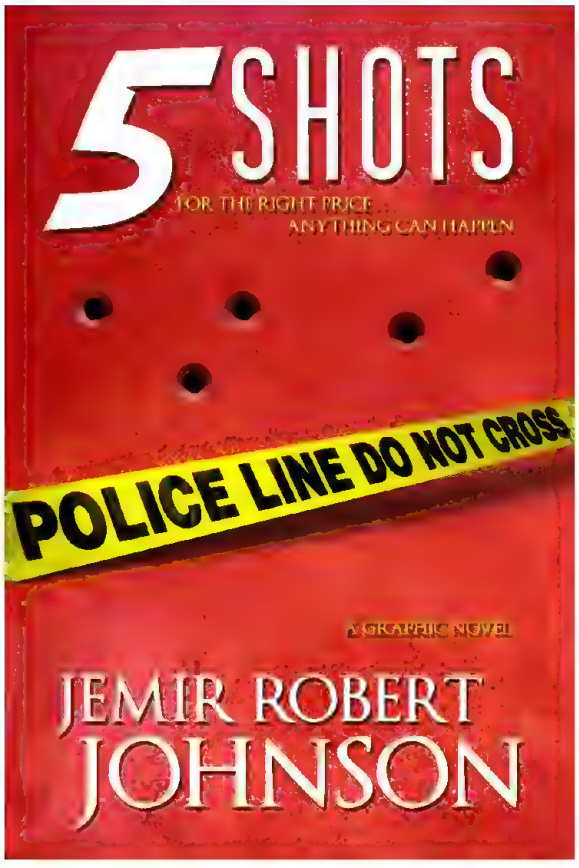
JJ: Funnily enough, the book that put me on the path of writing material for others to (potentially) see was a work of crime fiction, though with my interest in characters like Sherlock Holmes, John Shaft (who I knew and still identify via the 70s movie franchise; I didn't read the Ernest Tidyman books until a few years ago), Modesty Blaise, and Hawk from Spencer For Hire, the thought of creating something in the genre was likely planted before.

I received Walter Mosley's Devil in a Blue Dress as a gift from my Mom, because she remembered how I used to gravitate towards the detective/sleuth fiction I saw when looking through my uncle's "bag-of- books-he refused-to-part-with-under-any-circumstance-though-he-hadn't-thought-about-them-in-years" (laughter) as a pre-teen. Plus, the detective of the story was a black man that got things done… For her, whether or not I would like it was probably a no-brainer. But beyond enjoying it, the book gave me what I'll call "clarity of passion". I had written before—little things here and there to see something in my imagination put on paper—yet the energy of the story, which I pored through over a weekend, lit the spark that made me think I wanted to write stories to entertain people the way this one entertained me.

In truth, a writer is a writer in their heart, mind, and soul. I'm sure if Mosley's work hadn't lit the spark, I would have eventually come across a story or circumstance that did. That's the nature of the beast when you have a passion for something. You can ignore or downplay it… just not indefinitely. Still it's nice to say, even in jest, that a devil showed me the light (laughter).

SP!: Who or what would you consider to be your main inspirations and influences?

JJ: Though you just saw me go on about Walter Mosley, I have several. I think my flair



for layered character interaction and dialogue (one of my literary strengths), besides my ear and feel for the latter, comes from the effect that work from the previously mentioned Mosley, Christopher Priest (The Black Panther, The Crew, Steel, Quantum and Woody) and Aaron Sorkin (yeah THAT Aaron Sorkin {laughter}) had on me. My style and sense of pacing (I'm speaking of my overall body of work, but I find it's especially deep-rooted in my crime fiction) is a by-product of what I gained from the legendary Octavia Butler (Patternmaster, Wildseed, Kindred), George Pelecanos (Right As Rain, Hell To Pay, Soul Circus) and Chester Himes (A Rage In Harlem, Cotton Comes to Harlem). They all have this way of making every act—even normal, regular ones—move and resonate, with their strategic, sometimes subtle, use of symbolism and mood. My action beats–besides my long-time love of action-themed comic books–were absorbed from what I read from Donald Pendelton (The Mack Bolan Executioner series), Donald Goines (known for books such as Daddy Cool, Black Girl Lost, and others, but whom I discovered through the militant/vigilante/crime fighter themed Kenyatta series) and Robert Ludlow (The Jason Bourne book series). Of course I believe my style is its own thing, but that's a small (small for ME anyway {laughter}) list of those that helped shape it.

SP!: How do you approach writing a graphic novel?

JJ: I like to think I'm a creator by nature, writer by choice, and disciple of visual presentation. Generally, when it comes to graphic novels, I write a story of whatever page length in script, detailing how many panels are drawn on a page, what happens in each panel, camera angle, character action and settings, dialogue said by each character after I've created a character sheet, and story outline (which I have yet to ever finish, as I'm usually so wired to start the story by the third paragraph, that I jump into the script process and deal strictly with that until it's finished). Once the script's written, re-written, and edited to everyone's satisfaction, it's sent to the artist to draw, before it goes to the letterer and then back to myself and the editors to size and format. It can be a mentally taxing process at times, but it's always fun and worth it to me.

SP!: In 2008, you published 5 Shots, a graphic anthology focused on stories from the files of a sleuth named Jay Nova. What can you tell us about the anthology and the character?

JJ: 5 Shots is a five-story graphic novel collection featuring private eye Jay Nova and her con man, quick-fisted, partner Randy Michaels, as they tackle the dangerous and morally-compromising off-the-grid cases they book to keep bills paid. Jay's essentially a "fixer," using her private eye badge as cover to help the famous, rich, and desperate out of compromising or dangerous situations with which they can't go public or to the law. Her client base includes criminals, celebrities, politicians, clergymen… those with a lot to lose by being exposed or those who live with the belief that money makes them untouchable. With the Jay Nova stories, I'm always going to for 'dime pulp meets noir'-inspired illustrations with a hip-hop edge and I like that there are sometimes no clear-cut good guys or bad guys (since all the characters get their hands dirty in one way or another) and you might not know who to root for—or if you even want Jay and Randy to win—until the last few pages.

SP!: What would you say makes your main character stand out from other protagonists in this genre?

JJ: In truth, there HAVE BEEN hard-boiled private eyes, black female detectives, paranormal mind readers, and crime dramas with urban backdrops. I wasn't exactly re-inventing the wheel in either case. What there hasn't been is a series that combines them the way I think the team and I did with Blind Corners and its

predecessor 5 Shots. What there hasn't been is a circumstance where a character's telepathic ability is totally out of their control, not reliable, and (because of the pain it causes her after it's used) seen as an Achilles heel, even as it helps them accomplish the impossible. What's also unique is that with Jay, I wanted to fictionalize the tales (whether fact-based or urban legend) of "fixer for the rich and famous" types like Anthony Pellicano and Fred Otash. They were private eyes who had a who's who of celebrity clients from their respective eras and did whatever was needed, be it morally suspect or against the law, to make compromising situations disappear before they went public.

AND JAY LISTENED. JUST LISTENED.
OBSERVED.
SAW WHAT DIDN'T FIT. PEOPLE WORKING THE DINER TO BLEND IN...
READY TO MOVE.
SILENCE IS A DEADLY WEAPON.
GO!
BUT JAY BROUGHT ANOTHER.
RUN THROUGH THE KITCHEN. OUT THE EXIT. DON'T LOOK BACK.

Blending that with the "grey area" morality of your Sam Spade and Ms Tree types informs a lot of what I draw on to build a character. So, with her you can get a crime procedural, wrapped in a character study, cloaked in a veil of nail-biting action.

SP!: You've written other stories that have been featured in pulp adventure and fantasy anthologies, including Double Danger Tales, Legacy: Uprising, and Foreshadow. What can you share with us about these?

JJ: My work with those publications ranged from dime pulp (Double Danger Tales) superpower-themed action-adventure (Legacy: Uprising) and science-fantasy (Foreshadow). I like what I wrote for D.D.T., but you can tell with the Legacy and Foreshadow works—though they were passable—that I needed to improve on a few things. But, I'm a writer. I think it's against the law for us to be completely happy with anything we did from when we first started (laughter).

SP!: Do you find that you use a different approach or technique for a crime fiction story, as opposed to your adventure and fantasy work?

JJ: Not really. At least, not as far as crafting the story is concerned. If anything, there may be a difference in the way I research and present things, since the crime fiction I write is grounded primarily in the real world. That means everything I place in it—from the effects of a fight to the legal consequences of certain actions—is informed by real life, but does not always adhere to it completely. It all depends on what I feel best serves the narrative without coming off as disingenuous. Now with adventure or fantasy—mostly fantasy, since adventure can be seamlessly grounded in the real world too, if you mentally squint hard enough (laughter)—all I ever feel obligated to do is make sure I firmly establish what the rules of the imagined world are within the confines of the story and respect them once I do. My approach is to always tell a genuine story that will grab (hopefully) and entertain (foremost) whoever I'm fortunate enough to have reading what I created or contributed to.

SP!: With Blind Corners, you've brought Jay Nova back for more adventures. What is she facing this time?

JJ: Right or wrong, law-abiding or criminal, if you have a secret—and the money to bury it—Jay Nova's still the best call to make. Blind Corners is a four-story collection that shows how Jay uses her wit, fists, guns, and—through no control of her own and reluctantly—secret, unpredictable, mind-reading abilities to get what a client needs when the law can't help.

SP!: Did you always intend to self-publish your novels? What made you decide to go that route?

JJ: I was told by someone in the industry that the best way to break into the comic book field for paying work as a writer was to either establish yourself in another area (prose writing, screenplays) or self-publish your own work as a showcase (of sorts) that editors could look at, because few have the time or desire to read through

your longhand plot outlines and scripts, to gauge what you could do. It wouldn't necessarily lead to jobs, as I was led to believe, but it was a viable way to "post your resume". Beyond that, I was in-tune enough to know that even if/when I found opportunities to work with publishers, I would be playing with their toys, their word would be law whether I agreed with it or not (rightfully so), and I'd have to produce while following their schedule (again, rightfully so). As a creator, I like to have at least one outlet where I have majority control (since the collaborative nature of sequential storytelling assures that someone that doesn't do every part of a work themselves will never have full control of how the work is pieced together and presented). So, yeah, I think even on a subconscious level, before I had a catalog of characters to showcase, I had it in mind to self-publish some of my work.

SP!: What kinds of challenges have you encountered with self-publishing? Have you run into any situations that you didn't anticipate?

JJ: When I started self-publishing, I found the biggest challenge to be finding a way to stand out among the competition (whether a major corporate entity or fellow indie, whether you know it or not, the existence of your comic book/graphic novel puts you in the hunt to garner a consumer's—or direct market buyer's—hard-earned money at the expense of another's). See, the difference between publicity and marketing is that an effective publicity campaign will inform people you have something they may or may not take to, while an effective marketing campaign will convince them they need to have what you're offering in their lives, or on their book shelves, as the case may be. I was having problems doing the latter and executing the former. That was because I was trying to play things the way I thought you were supposed to the play them, instead of doing what I should've to find the best fit and approach for me as an individual to use. The way I was able to fix that is, in part, connected.

SP!: What would you say is the best advice you got or the best advice you wish you'd been given about self-publishing?

JJ: "Want an easier way to make money? Rob a well-guarded bank… blindfolded!" (laughter) That's me paraphrasing what a fellow self-publisher told me in jest, years ago. The lesson I took from that statement was—and this is part of what helped me fix one of the things I was doing wrong—you're not going to win a game you don't control and one which segments of your competition have been doing longer. It took that to help me realize it wasn't my job to go broke while pursuing my passion. With that, the desire to even do monthlies gave way to a focus on one-shots and graphic novel collections, which I could plan and budget for a bit better. Self-publishing isn't something you want to get into in order to get rich (not from the publishing aspect, anyway. That's not to say your character won't strike a chord and hit some other licensing or multi-media pay dirt), because you'll lose money and find yourself disappointed, more often than not. Your best bet is to control the game (the parts of it that you can control), so that you're spending money in increments that won't hurt you right away for however long it takes for your project to be completed and come out. I've applied that to lose less and less money and actually saw my first in-the-black profit with 5 Shots—and that continues with Blind Corners.

SP!: With your imprint, Dark Hat Noir, are you also publishing works by other authors? If so, what are you looking for in a DHN title?

JJ: While my long-range goal is to someday be able to publish crime noir graphic novels featuring black characters by other creators, for the immediate future, the imprint will be used to feature my urban mystery/thriller work, either in conjunction with other publishers or on my own.

SP!: How do you currently handle the marketing and promotion end of things?

JJ: The answer is, in part, a follow up to the "best advice you got" question. A revelation I had while trying to think on how I could grow a fanbase for my works (I mean, in addition to that whole "provide a quality product a healthy portion your intended audience may enjoy" thing the hep cats are tweeting about these days {laughter}) was that every book and type of book has a number of people who'll purchase it. Thing is, the person looking to sell it has to go where they are. Likewise, doing something as simple as standing out—by being where a product like yours isn't commonplace—can cause a positive shift.

When I promote, I think in terms of generating buzz for my product with thoughts that THAT will spread the message of the product I want to market. I've seen people—myself included—spend big money (if not in actual dollars than in relation to their available funds) trying to generate book sales by advertising with x amount of funds in Magazine A (with its wide readership) or Website/Podcast B (promising this many hits or listeners). In truth, I find that I'm better off spending conservatively to do virtual book tours and establish a presence among the urban crime literature, dime pulp, and mystery thriller demographics, while utilizing local vending opportunities (where I pay little to nothing for table space on the strength of being a local talent).

The bottom line is, nothing you do guarantees whether or not your book sells or sells well. But since not promoting isn't an option and spending money I may not be able to spare just to rent space (which is what an ad, is since one million guaranteed readers doesn't equal a sale to whatever percentage or mean that they'll even glance at the ad, just that it's in a publication or venue they read or listen to daily) isn't in the game plan. I focus my energies on finding economical ways to let people know about what I'm offering and why they might like it. To that end Facebook, Twitter and my author page on Goodreads are the platforms I work with most and they have proven effective.

SP!: Have you received much in the way of critical feedback? How about reader response?

JJ: Response has ranged from glowingly positive to "ehh … it was all right" (laughter). I haven't run into anyone who thought the book was horrible (yet!) and everyone seems to find something admirable or relatable in the Jay Nova character, so… I'm good with that. I'm going to continue working to make each story stronger than the last, though.

SP!: What's next on the horizon for you?

JJ: I've managed to put a healthy number of things in motion, so for the next couple of years, you'll see lots of products with my name attached. The ones that I can talk about now include Curse of The Chameleon God, which is a magic-themed/fantasy adventure tale with Winston Blakely's Little Miss Strange character. There's also a pulp-noir collection set in 1930s Harlem called Midnight Phantom: a graphic novel I'm writing stories for, which will also be drawn by the incredibly-talented Winston Blakely. Think the sleek pulp-crime styling of a movie such as The Maltese Falcon, if directed by Gordon Parks, from a Chester Himes screenplay, with a Paul Robeson archetype playing a fresh-from-the-grave masked "man of mystery" taking on the Mafia, corrupt cops, and other figures plying their trade in the underworld… and that gives you an idea of what to expect.

There will also be contributions to sword-and-sorcery anthologies, as well as well as three one-shots and a full length Jay Nova graphic novel on deck. In addition to that, there's Chamber Made, a full-length Jay Nova graphic novel, as well as my multiple story contributions to Dark Edge Magazine (a sort of metal hurlant/heavy metal-inspired science-fantasy collection), the second volume of Immortal Fantasy, a third Little Miss Strange collection called Serpent of The Quantum Sphere (all from Winston's Blakelyworks Studios imprint), and another of other things I hope you'll enjoy when the time comes.

SP!: Is there anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't touched on yet?

JJ: Beyond thanking everyone who's shown direct and indirect support for what I'm doing, and letting the artists I've been fortunate enough to work with know how much I appreciate them giving me the opportunity to do so, I want to let everyone know that success isn't always measured in what your work brings you but what you gain from it. I look forward to meeting and supporting my fellow independent movers in any way I can.

SP!: Finally, how can readers keep up-to-date with you and your work?

JJ: If someone wants to get in touch with me, I can be reached at Jjohns@creativeelamentz.com or 1story@creativeelaamentz.com.You can also find me hovering around our creative Elamentz page on Facebook, https: //www. facebook. com/pages/Creative-Elamentz-Studios/77232917716

My author's page on Goodreads is http: //www. goodreads. com/author/show/953989. Jemir_Robert_Johnson

There's also the creative elamentz Twitter page, https: //twitter. com/CREATIVEELAMENT

You can find my Jay Nova books on Amazon:

http: //www. amazon. com/5-Shots-Jemir-Robert-Johnson/dp/0981827802

http: //www. amazon. com/Blind-Corners-Jemir-Johnson/dp/0981827837/ref=pd_sim_sbs_b_1/182-8775611-6748429?ie=UTF8&refRID=1763JQ1J7HH8X8JP9HXN

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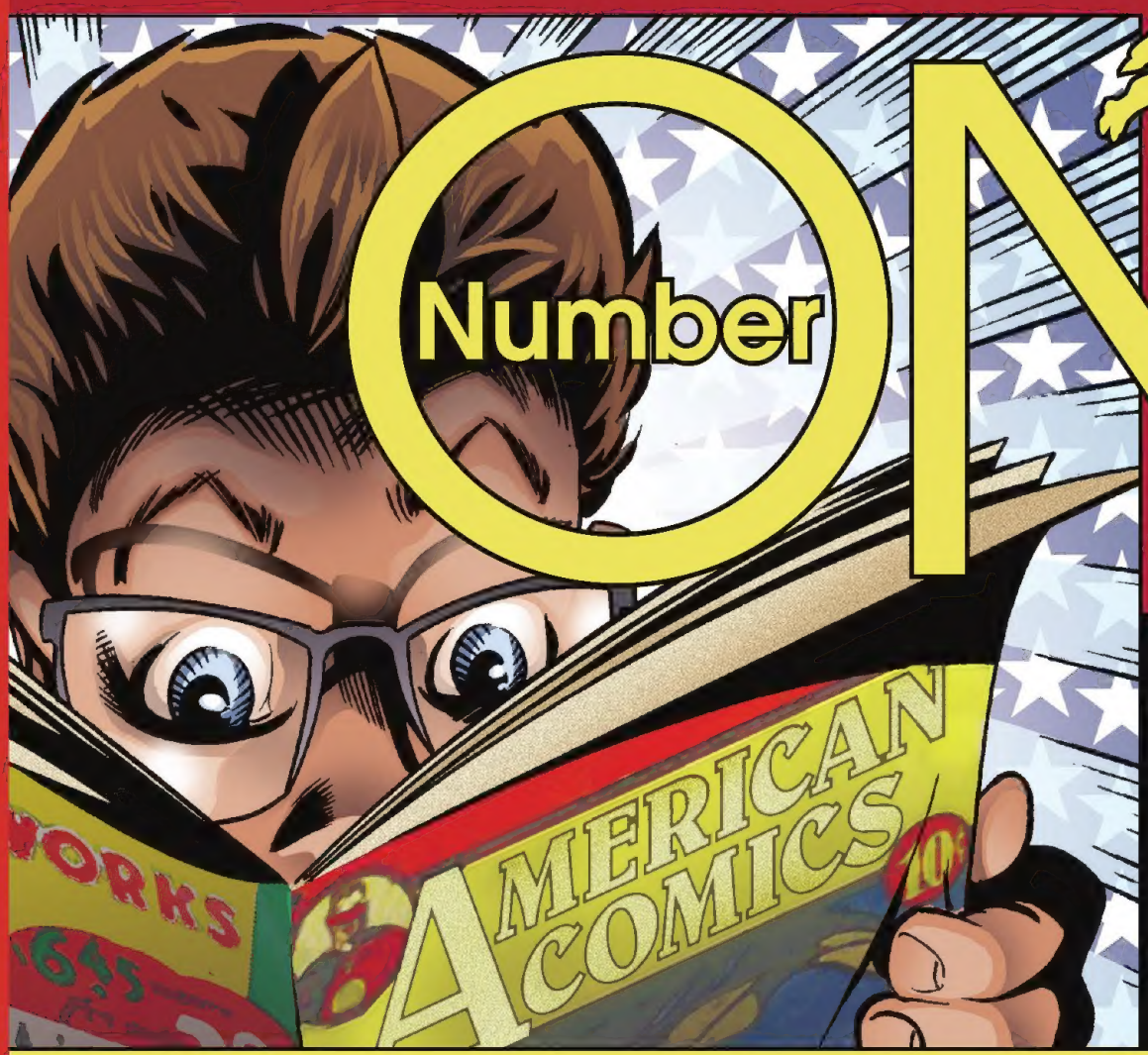

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